A BETTER KIND OF POLITICS
Civilize It

Examination of Conscience

Loving Our Neighbors in the Public Square

Pope Francis reminds us that in the Gospel of Matthew we are called to be "salt of the earth and light of the world."

> *"Although there are many reasons to be discouraged, amid many prophets of destruction and condemnation, and so many negative and despairing voices, may you be a positive force, **salt and light** for this society. Like the engine of a train, may you be the driving force leading all towards their destination. May you be sowers of hope, builders of bridges and agents of dialogue and harmony."*
>
> *- Pope Francis, Message during Apostolic Journey, April 29, 2017*

Similarly, in his encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis writes:

> *"In imitation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, 'we want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity… to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation.'"*
>
> *- Pope Francis,* Fratelli Tutti, *no. 276*

How are we each called to be "salt and light"? What does it look like to be "builders of bridges," breakers of walls, and "agents of dialogue," especially in an atmosphere where vitriol and personal attacks have become more common? How do Pope Francis' words challenge us to engage differently? Through prayer and reflection, formed consciences and honest dialogue, we can bring the convictions of our faith to our participation in civic life, and in our communities.

Use this reflection to help you think about where God is calling you to be "salt and light" in your family and community, and in your engagement online. Where can you better engage in encounter and bridge-building?

Begin with Scripture and Prayer

Begin by reading Matthew 5:13-16 on the call to be salt and light.

As "salt and light" we are called to speak truth with love and bear witness to God's love in our world. Salt is both common across the world's cultures and gives flavor to any food it touches. Our presence, like salt to food, enhances and strengthens our communities, especially where we can serve as witnesses of love and civility.

Then pray asking God to be present with you during this time of reflection. The Prayer for Life and Dignity of the Human Person is a good option.

Now spend some time in prayerful reflection using the prompts below.

What stories from my community have left an impression on me and led me to ask, "What can I do to change this?" Where have

> "All of us have a responsibility for the wounded, those of our own people and all the peoples of the earth."
>
> - Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti,* no. 79

I been called to action? What issues or injustices have I felt drawn to work on in my community?

In the past, how have I engaged or disengaged in efforts to address issues I care about, including through engagement in the political process as a faithful citizen? What has drawn me towards or away from engagement?

What perspectives on issues impacting our local and global communities elicit strong negative reactions in me? What is at the root of that feeling or why do I feel the way I do?

When have I allowed that strong feeling to cause me to say or think something unkind about another person? Specifically:

- *On social media:* When has my engagement with (or about) those with whom I disagree failed to recognize their dignity as persons created in the image of God?

- *In conversations*: When was I so focused on winning an argument that I failed to genuinely listen? When was my choice of words uncharitable? When did I paint others in disrespectful ways or engage in personal attack?

- *In my day-to-day perceptions and attitudes:* When have I made assumptions about or failed to give the benefit of the doubt to those with whom I disagree? When have I presumed others' intentions or experiences before even hearing their stories or experiences? When have I valued my political affiliation or party more than my identity as a disciple of Christ who is called to model love and charity, even in civil discourse?

How is Christ calling me to strive to recognize the human dignity of someone with whom I disagree—even passionately?

Close with Prayer

Close with a few moments of prayer and conversation with God about how you might be called to be "salt and light" in your family, parish, school, workplace, or other community (in-person or online).

We exist in a culture of incivility and inaction, but as followers of Christ we must work to transform that culture. We can be models of loving and respectful civil discourse, and challenge others to do the same. We can build community through our willingness to engage in dialogue across differences. Salt, while common, is not a passive ingredient. Nor must we be passive participants in difficult conversations. In working to transform our culture, we can choose to be strong in our convictions while also open to learning more from others' experiences.

How are you called to share your faith with your community?

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